

INCENSE AND LIGHT

NO. 1710

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresses the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it. And when Aaron lights the lamps at even, he shall burn incense upon it, a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations.”
Exodus 30:7, 8.

CERTAIN ceremonies under the law were only of annual celebration, while other matters were of daily observation. And by the daily repetition they were intended to be set forth as eminently constant and perpetual. These daily ordinances were to be regarded by the children of Israel as of standing obligation, abiding types of constant necessity, never to be removed so long as the dispensation should last.

When the priest went into the tabernacle, he could not enter it without being warned of sin and of sacrifice, for at the entrance of the holy place stood an altar of brass, upon which there was offered, every morning a lamb and every evening a lamb. This taught that access to God was not possible except by expiation—expiation by bloody sacrifice, expiation by the death of a substituted victim, expiation which must continue as long as sin remained. You could not even enter into the first court without the sight of an altar, and blood, and fire. Thus showing us that there is no coming to God, even on the ordinary level of Christian experience, apart from the atonement made by our Lord Jesus, who is “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” You cannot be heard in penitent prayer, or receive pardon, or commence the life of faith, or be even a babe in grace, unless you know the great truth, that the Lord “has made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.” Without the shedding of blood, remission of sin and access to God are out of the question. Paul ascribes our drawing near unto the Lord to our Savior’s perfect sacrifice, for he says, “You who sometimes were far off are made near by the blood of Christ.”

Before the innermost sanctuary there hung a substantial veil and the entrance into the Holy of Holies was only permitted once in the year. If that veil had been lifted up so that we could enter, we would have found at the door a golden altar, to represent again, our Lord Jesus Christ under another aspect. For on that golden altar there was offered a sweet perfume of precious spices, denoting His perpetual intercession on the behalf of His people and His enduring merits which are continually being presented by Himself before the throne of the Most High. To go within the veil you must pass by the altar of incense. Learn, therefore, that to the door of the inner chamber of communion with God we must approach by the perfect merit of our redeeming Lord. We come not in our own merit, but we are “accepted in the Beloved.” If we have ever been favored with high and holy communion with God, such as He reserves for favored saints, if we have been enabled to come boldly to the throne of heavenly grace, and have looked into the tempered brightness of that light which shines above the mercy seat, we have come only by virtue of the infinite merit of our Lord Jesus. The lowest form of communion in the outer court must be by the sacrifice of Jesus. And the highest form of communion, even that which is most intense and most delightful, is still by Christ. The incense sets forth His merit and that is not without blood, for once in the year the horns of the altar were smeared with the blood which had been carried within the veil. There was no coming within the veil without passing by the incense altar, even as there is no access to God but by the all-powerful mediation of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us never forget this. Simple as the truth is, we are apt to pass it by as of no force. I am afraid we are apt to put the most important truths into the background because they seem to be so elementary. But we ought to remember that they are elementary only because they are essential from first to last. Never try to draw near to God in prayer, or praise, or meditation, or Scripture reading, or holy service apart from Jesus Christ, or your attempt will be a fail-

ure. Through the wall of fire which surrounds the throne, you can only pass by way of the one door, namely, the body and blood of our great Mediator, Sacrifice and Substitute. Is not that door sufficient? Why should we climb up some other way? If I am very heavy of heart, do not let me try to raise my spirits and so come in the power of human courage. But let me come just as I am, made bold through Him whose comforts delight my soul. If I feel that I have been sinning, do not let me try to get rid of my sin by some other process, and then draw near to God. But let me come, sinner as I am, in the name of the sinner's Savior, and so draw near to God, having washed my robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Jesus says, "I am the way," why should we seek another? Have nothing to do with an absolute God, only deal with Him through a mediator, and keep to that way, for no man comes unto the Father but by the Lord Jesus. Oh, you most experienced and privileged ones, take good note of the golden altar, and whenever you approach the mercy seat, let the cloud of its incense cover you and perfume your prayers.

Hard by the golden altar, which was nearest to the Holy of Holies, stood the golden candlestick with its seven branches. These two instructive types were set near each other for a purpose which I would open up today. This candlestick was a matter of daily ordinance as much as the bronze altar of sacrifice, or the golden altar of incense. It was for continual use and was therefore dressed twice each day. We have a continual need of the precious atonement of Christ, of the intercession of Christ, and of the light of God's Holy Spirit. These are not things for once in a year, these are matters for every day and all day, and therefore they were attended to both at morning and at evening, as if to shut in all the hours of the day within two golden doors. Every morning had its lamb, its burning incense, and its lighted lamp, and the same pertained to every evening all the year round. Thus all days were fringed and bordered with this three-fold type. Even as at this time, all our days are sanctified by faith in the effectual expiation, joy in the prevailing intercession, and delight in the clear shining of the Spirit which makes glad all who are in the house.

This morning I desire to call your attention to the conjunction which was established by the divine law between the burning of the incense and the lighting of the lamps. These two things, being both of daily observance, were attended to at the same moment for reasons worthy of our study.

I. And first I call your attention to THE WONDERFUL COOPERATION BETWEEN THE INTERCESSION OF CHRIST FOR US AND THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN US. See how on the grandest scale the incense of intercession and the lamp of spiritual illumination are set side by side. He whose merit brings us life is in divine alliance with Him who brings us light. Indeed, there is such unity between them that Jesus Himself is said to be a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of His people Israel. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ brings with it the communion of the Holy Spirit, for the Father has joined them together.

Note *that we have these both revealed in their fullness at the same time.* When our Lord ascended on high to plead before the throne, the Spirit descended to abide in the Church. After the Lord was taken up, the disciples received the promise of the Father and were illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Jesus our great High Priest presented the sweet savor of His own person and work, before the eternal throne, and then came the Spirit of God as tongues of fire lighting up the sons of men and making them to be as candles of the Lord. Well said the apostle at Pentecost—"This Jesus has God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being exalted by the right hand of God, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has shed forth this, which you now see and hear." I say the two come historically together and we must forever connect in our meditations the ascended Savior's intercession and the illumination of the saints by the descended Spirit.

Now, as they were connected historically, so are they *continually connected as a matter of fact.* At this day it is as it was at Pentecost. Our Lord has not ceased to intercede, and the Spirit has not ceased to illuminate. Herein lies our hope for our own eternal salvation, in the ceaseless plea and the quenchless light. For the working out of that which God is working in us, both to will and to do of His own good pleasure, we have these two guarantees and helps—the Savior praying and the Spirit shining. Jesus is pleading, and therefore our faith fails not when Satan sifts us as wheat. The Spirit is working, and therefore the light of our faith is sustained by secret mystic oil which prevents the enemy from putting it out. This is also our two-fold confidence when we go forth into the world to preach the gospel. Unto the

Lord Jesus all power is given in heaven and in earth, and He is “able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them.” The Church of God must succeed in her mission because her errand is the object of the continual prayers of her living Lord. But she has her second help, namely the Comforter, who abides with us and goes forth with the word that we preach, making it potent for the conversion of the sons of men. We have the incense of Christ’s merit pleading with God, and the light of God’s Spirit pleading with men. We have Christ as an advocate with God, and the Holy Spirit as an advocate with men. What more is needed? What joy and confidence we ought to feel in the work of the Lord since Jesus is pleading and the Spirit is striving at the same time, the incense rising, filling earth and heaven with its sweetness, and the Spirit brightly shining to the comfort and delight of those who go forth into the darkness with the name of Jesus on their lips. Joy to those who sit in darkness and in the valley of the shadow of death, for even for them is this seven-fold light shining. And to their dank, pestilential abodes there comes the healing breath of sweet perfume from the Redeemer’s merits.

Furthermore, this conjunction, as it is a matter of history, and as it is continuous, *will always be seen by us, personally, when our prayer is the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man* that avails much. It needs the Trinity to make a Christian; it needs the Trinity to make a Christian prayer. The Father must hear us, else of what use are our cries? But the ordained Mediator must also stand between us and the Father, presenting His merit like the smoke of sweet incense, or else our prayer can never be accepted of God. And to come down closer to ourselves, the Spirit of God must also help our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought. So that whenever we pray we must have these two in happy conjunction, intercession and enlightenment, incense and light. My prayer as my own prayer is a poor, vain, defiled thing unless Jesus perfumes it. And it is a poor, dark, blind thing unless the Spirit of God has enlightened it. The Holy Spirit teaches us what to pray for, and how to order our words aright. In His light we see light. We are in the dark till He shines like the golden candlestick, and enables us to see our own need and the fullness of God’s grace. It is His light that makes our heart to see the Lord in prayer, so that we seek the Lord by the light of His own Spirit. When prayer is the work of the Spirit in the heart we are absolutely certain that it must succeed, because the Spirit makes intercession in the saints according to the will of God. The Holy Spirit is one with the Father, and He is most truly God, so that whatever He prompts us to pray for is the same thing which the Father has already decreed and eternally determined to bestow. Our wishes and desires might never succeed with God if they were that and no more, for our thoughts are not His thoughts, neither are our ways His ways. But the thoughts and purposes of God, when these are photographed upon our spirit by the Holy Spirit, are the pictures of that which is assuredly to be, the prophecy of the determinate purpose and foreknowledge of God. What is written in yon sealed book, upon which no human eye can gaze, is transcribed and written by the Spirit of God upon our hearts, and thus we pray for that very thing which God designs to give. There is an assured certainty of success to the prayer that is made in the power of the Spirit of God. While praying in the Holy Spirit we have the petition which we have asked of the Lord.

But then there is our second comfort that Jesus stands ready to take every prayer of ours, however imperfect in knowledge, however feeble in expression, however marred with sorrow, and He presents the purified and perfected prayer with His own merit and it is sure to speed. The sins of our holy things are seldom absent, and therefore the constant need that we have an Advocate. Blessed be God for that inspired word, “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” True prayer is the offering to God of the merit of the Lord Jesus, and therefore it must be accepted. What can be refused to merit such as His? True prayer is presented always by the Lord Jesus, and therefore, again, its certainty of efficacy. How can the Father deny anything to the Well-beloved? It is written in the book of the Revelation—“And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel’s hand.” Can we doubt the success of prayers presented by the angel of the covenant? Assuredly not. There is such excess of perfection in Christ that it covers all our imperfection. There is such delicious sweetness in Christ to the Father that it effectually destroys the ill savor of anything that comes from us. And by its power we ourselves become unto God a sweet

savor, and so also are our prayers when they are presented by Jesus Christ. I like to think of the incense, and of the lamp, and best of all, of the two together, for these two enable me to come boldly to the throne of the heavenly grace to obtain mercy and find grace. Acceptance through sweet savor and light through divine teaching, are both mine as my soul waits upon God, with her expectation turned towards Him.

Nor ought I to pass away from this first head without noting that *in God's drawing near to man* there is the same conjunction of incense and light. If the glory of God were to come forth from between the cherubim, if it should come past the veil to be revealed throughout the world, that glory would pass by these two, the golden altar of incense and the golden lamp of light. I mean this; God can have no dealing with men at all except through the merit of Christ and the light of the Spirit. As for the work of our Lord Jesus, you and I believe in the special substitution of Christ for His elect. What we call, "particular redemption," is held most firmly by us, for we believe that He redeemed us from among men, and that He laid down His life for the sheep. Yet there are many passages of Scripture which speak of the work of Christ as having a universal bearing. He is, "the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." We are told that, by the grace of God, "He tasted death for every man." Now, the atonement of Christ is many-sided, and may be viewed in very different lights. And while I trust we shall never be shaky about the question of His literal and effectual substitution for His own chosen, whereby He offered for them a most sure, effectual and perfect satisfaction, so that no sin can ever be laid to their charge, yet there is, on the other hand, a general and universal view of His atoning work. God could not have dealt with the world at all in the way of mercy apart from the sacrifice of Christ. The only thing which could have been done with the race of man was to have crushed it out forever if Christ had not stood for them as an interposer. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. For the sake of the man Christ Jesus God was able to look upon the fallen race in justice, and yet prepare mercy for the guilty. Men owe their lives to the sacrifice of Christ. Men owe the various alleviations of their sorrows by God's gracious tenderness in providence to the sacrifice of Christ. Above all, that free and honest proclamation of salvation to every man that will believe in Christ Jesus is rendered possible by the wondrous, perfect, unlimited, illimitable merit which resided in the person and the work of such a one as Jesus our Lord.

The picture before you is a very beautiful one. Here are spices of the most precious kind, made up into a compound such as never was compounded for any other purpose. This divinely-appointed mixture of sweet odors is placed in the censer upon the golden altar—that is to say, eternal acceptance is found in the person of Christ. The incense is kindled with fire from on high. What follows? The spices begin to burn, and up ascends a pillar of smoke. See how it rises high into the clear air, and as it rises it expands like a cloud, covers the sky, is wafted all around, and perfumes the whole air with its own exceeding fragrance. It rises and rises till it enters heaven—yes, and the heaven of heavens. Its sacred odor is recognized in every golden street. It fills every chamber of the glorious "house of God not made with hands." It ascends to the throne of His excellent Majesty, and the Lord is well pleased with it, and again is fulfilled the words which are written concerning the burnt-offering of Noah—"The Lord smelled a sweet savor; and the Lord said in His heart, I will not again smite everything living as I have done." Such is the merit of Christ that through its sweet savor God looks down upon the world and treats it with long-suffering, tenderness and mercy. Is it not a blessed picture? As a just and holy God He could not deal with a guilty race except through a mediatorial sacrifice, which should wrap mankind in its cloud of merit and reconcile the world unto Himself.

And now you and I may follow in the track of God, and go out and preach the gospel to every creature without the slightest fear, because the whole air is perfumed with the incense of a Savior's mediatorial work. Although not perceptible by carnal sense, yet the inward spirit in the soul of the believer perceives the grateful odor of the finished work of the ever-living Savior sweetening all things, so that now we call nothing common or unclean, but are prepared to deliver our message to the vilest of the vile. God in Christ is kind even to the unthankful and the evil, and wills that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, and that to every creature the gospel should be preached.

We shall not, however, proceed to any practical purpose unless we remember next, that when God comes to deal with men, it is with the light of the Spirit as well as with the merit of Christ. The golden candlestick is as necessary as the golden censer, for God's work among men is always by His Spirit. He is seeking out His people as the woman sought for her lost piece of money, and it is significant that it is written, "She did light a candle and sweep the house." God in His work of salvation comes to men with the candle of His Word lighted through the Holy Spirit, and through the teaching of His Word from day to day that Spirit shines as from a lantern among the sons of men. If you and I would follow in the track of God, as His dear children imitating Him, we must take with us the light of the gospel of the glory of God, and by the power and light of His Spirit we must make known to men the unsearchable riches of Christ. To us Jehovah is our light and our salvation, and when we go in His name we must not go without the light. Thus you see we come to God by the incense and the light, and even so does God come down to man to bless Him.

II. Secondly, our text seems to me to teach THE CONNECTION BETWEEN PRAYER AND KNOWLEDGE. The golden altar represents intercession offered by Christ, and also the prayers of all the saints, which are accepted through His intercession. And as the candlestick stood side by side with it, and represented the light of the Spirit of truth, so must true prayer and true knowledge never be separated.

So I gather, first, that *prayer should be attended with knowledge*. It is ill when men worship they know not what. God is light and He will not have His people worship Him in the dark. When they burn the incense they must also light the lamp. In the Romish Church the mass of the people repeat prayers in an unknown tongue, having no idea of what their meaning may be, and this is both a grievous wrong to the people and a mockery of God. What can be the good of such prayers in the sight of Him who seeks those to worship Him who worship Him in spirit and in truth? Mere sounds without meaning are not prayer. Understanding, desire, and heart must go with every word, or else the prayers are vain repetitions, such as the heathen employ. Supplicants must know what they are asking, or they are not really asking. And you, dear people of God, please notice that the more divine knowledge you get, all things being equal, the more complete will your prayers become. "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," light the lamp at the same time that you kindle the incense.

For instance, when you pray, what prayer can there be without knowing God our Father? How can you pray aright to an unknown god? The more knowledge of God, the more correct prayer becomes. He that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. What prayer can there be apart from the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ? If we know nothing of Him by whom we pray, how full of sins of ignorance will our prayers be! It is well also, to have a deep, sensible knowledge of sin. Penitential prayers are impossible without this, and how can prayers be accepted if penitence is not mixed with our petitions? We need at the same time that we have the knowledge of sin to have knowledge of our own weaknesses. The man, who is consciously weak, prays for strength, but he who dreams that he is strong will not do so. You need to study yourselves before you pray, so as to ask for those things in which you are most deficient, and for protection against those constitutional tendencies or besetting sins to which you are most subject. The prayer of ignorance is like an arrow shot by a blind man, which is not likely to hit the mark. In proportion as petitions arise from a heart fully instructed in its own necessities will they be likely to ask for the right blessings, and to be prepared aright before the Lord. David wished his prayers to be accepted, and therefore he cried, "Let my prayer be set forth before You as incense."

A supremely excellent piece of knowledge is to know the promises which we are to plead. Here you have the very sinews of prayer. When a man knows the promise suitable to his case, and lays it before God, saying, "Do as You have said," he presents the best form of supplication. Remember how Jacob pleaded with the Lord the sacred word of promise saying, "You said, I will surely do you good"? When we have looked at all the bearings of the petition so as to make quite certain that it is a petition, the fulfillment of which will glorify God, when we see that it must be consistent with the divine will because of the various statements which God has made in His Word, and because of promises which He has given concerning the matter, then, with the lamp shining clearly upon us, we shall kindle the incense the more discreetly and boldly, and both our prayers and our meditations will be the more accepted of the

Lord. Do try, especially, dear brethren, you that pray in public, to light the lamps when you kindle the incense. It will be for the good of us all if petitions are thoughtful, suitable, Scriptural and withal fresh and hearty. Let us never degenerate into repeating the same expressions till they grow to be mechanical. Let us never drop into the use of hackneyed prayers for everything in general and for nothing in particular. But as instructed men, having thought of what we are going to say; having adapted our prayer to our circumstances and needs, let us order our case before the Lord, and fill our mouth with arguments. Burn the incense of prayer in the light of the Spirit of revelation, praying in the Holy Spirit.

But now turn the thought round the other way—*knowledge should always be accompanied by prayer*. Whenever we are taught of God, His teaching almost always comes in connection with prayer. But lest we should solely try to learn and forget to pray, let me remind you of a few particulars. Dear brothers and sisters, as a Christian you are a disciple, or student, be also a suppliant. When you are impressed with the greatness, or the goodness, or the immutability, or the faithfulness of God, straightway turn your impressions into supplications. Pray the great God to be gracious to you. Ask the unchangeable God to be the same to you, beg the faithful God to keep His promises to you, implore the mighty God to uphold you. As you learn more and more of God, place the light near the incense by using your knowledge in your pleadings. To employ all your knowledge as fuel for prayer will be the best way of utilizing your acquirements. It will stamp truth firmly on your memory, and it will sanctify your heart.

When you know more of the Savior, pray your way to Him by it, as ships move into port by their sails. If you have seen His manhood, go and plead His sympathy with you in your weakness. If you have thought more of His Deity, go and worship Him more reverently, and pray that His glory may be seen among the sons of men. Whatever point in the unutterable glory of His perfection breaks most upon your mind pray most that way, opening your window towards the sunrise. So will the Lord teach you more and so shall you have profited by that which you have learned.

If from day to day, my brothers and sisters, you learn more of your sinfulness, then you have more errands with which to come to the mercy seat. And if you make a new discovery by experience of your corruption and indwelling sin, fly at once to the throne of grace with your discovery lest it weigh you down and drive you to despondency. Make a ladder of your needs with which to climb nearer to heaven. The more your necessities, the more urgent let your persistence be. Cry mightily to God because of the greatness of your poverty. I do not think there is anything in the Scriptures which we cannot pray over. If we learn the devices of the devil, let us pray against them. If we learn the depravity of mankind, let us pray God's Holy Spirit to create men's hearts anew. Everything from the first of Genesis to the end of Revelation, when we truly know it, furnishes us with fresh arguments for drawing near to God. Revealed truth is as a church bell summoning us to come into the presence of the Lord, and bow the knee before Him. As you hear a sermon, turn it into prayer. Even if you find that there is nothing in the sermon, it may benefit you if you pray God to feed His poor famished people. If you will pray all through his discourse, every preacher will minister to your edification directly or indirectly. If you are set upon praying by the lighting of the tiniest candle that ever glimmered, there will at least be sweetness in the incense even if there is no brilliance in the lamp.

III. I desire, in the third place, to show SOME SPECIAL PRACTICAL CONNECTION BETWEEN THE INCENSE AND THE LAMP. Let us read the text again, "And Aaron shall burn thereon sweet incense every morning: when he dresses the lamps, he shall burn incense upon it." So, then, there should be prayer especially at the dressing of the lamps, that is to say, when preparing our minds for that ministry by which we enlighten the people among whom we dwell we should be especially earnest in prayer. Preparation for preaching and teaching is most important. God's work is not to be done carelessly as boys shoot arrows at random in their play. We must prepare both by reading and pleading. We must, like the apostles, give ourselves to the Word of God and prayer. We are told by ancient Rabbis that when the priest who was appointed for that office went into the Holy Place, he took with him the golden snuffers, the golden snuff dishes, and a vessel full of pure olive oil, and by the help of these he attended to the trimming of the golden lamp. There were seven lamps on the candelabra. Some of these might have gone quite out during the night. He would have to take away whatever of snuff remained, wipe out the lamp, place a new wick, fill it up with fresh oil, and then kindle the flame anew. In another lamp it may be the light was still burning but feebly. He might have simply to snuff it, take away the "superfluity of

naughtiness” in the golden snuff dish and make all things clean and right. Sometimes the light might be burning well and nothing was needed but to replenish it with oil. Thus all was set in order for another day. The same was done in the evening. In the process of trimming lamps there is a measure of offense, snuffs do not give forth a very dainty perfume, and the smear and smelt of oil are not altogether of sweet savor. Therefore, before he trimmed the lamps, the priest kindled the incense. No snuff would then be offensive, for the overpowering fragrance of the incense killed it all and prevented the prevalence of any odor unfit for the house of God. When we go into our studies to try and trim our lamps, let us remember that our first business is to pray. Alas, we have much of smoking wick about us, much negligence, much ignorance, many mistakes and errors, and thereby we shall grieve the Lord if Jesus is not called in to cover all. When we are preparing in secret to serve the Lord in public we shall make poor work of it if we do not beforehand draw near to God in prayer. We need that our garments should be made to smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia by being covered with the merit of Jesus, or else we shall offend even while engaged in the holy act of preparing to spread abroad the light of divine truth. You have to trim your lamps, brothers and sisters, when you go into the Sunday school—at least, I hope you do. I hope you do not run into your class with anything which first comes to hand. If you do not snuff your candles and feed your lamps with fresh oil, your children will sit in darkness before a lamp which does not shine. No, there ought to be careful preparation, according as your time and ability will allow, and above all, the pouring in of the holy oil of the Holy Spirit, by fresh fellowship with Jesus. In that process one of the chief elements is prayer. Dr. Adam Clarke used to say to young ministers, “Study yourselves dead and then pray yourselves alive again,” and that is an excellent rule. Work in your study as if it all depended upon you, and then go forth and speak, trusting in God because all depends upon Him. Remember that the chief part of all study of God’s Word must be prayer. This is the boring rod and the powder by which we burst open the great rocks of truth. “To have prayed well is to have studied well,” said Martin Luther, and so most certainly it is. Therefore let none of us when we dress the lamp forget the incense.

What a double privilege comes of this! This priest, you see, had thus two things to do for the Lord. If he was called only to light the lamp, that would have been one happy, blessed service. But if he must burn the incense too, he has a double portion of honor in thus doubly serving the Lord his God. So when you are preparing to light up the people, or preparing to enlighten your children in class, what a happy necessity it is which calls upon you at the same time to pray! It is one of the greatest privileges of preachers and teachers, that they are driven to pray more than other people, for they have greater necessities. They have necessities that come upon them because of their office, and these drive them to more frequent supplication, and so their labors become a means of grace to their own souls. Let us thank our Lord Jesus that He has made us kings and priests unto our God, and that He permits us both to let our lights shine before men, and our prayers ascend before God.

One thing more, this burning of the incense was not only at the dressing of the lamps, but also *at the kindling of the lamps*, when they began to shine. I want to plead, dear friends, very heartily with you that when it is my privilege to come here this week and at all other times to light the lamps, you who are my beloved helpers will take care to burn the incense at the same time. We need the incense of prayer more than ever in these latter days. Did you ever notice in Ezekiel 41:22 that an altar of incense is spoken of, but its dimensions are twice as great as those of the golden altar in the Tabernacle, as if, say some, to teach us that in these gospel times, prayer would become more abundant and would be offered up more frequently than ever. The Gentiles have an altar which presents more incense to the Lord than that which was served by Aaron. And inasmuch as it is more purely spiritual, it is all the more acceptable with God. The altar mentioned by Ezekiel was of wood. As if to show that our worship is to become simpler, and to be more divested of everything that is pompous and showy. Indeed, the altar disappears, and we read, “This is the table that is before the Lord.” You will guess the meaning.

Malachi has a glorious prophecy. “For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto My name, and a pure offering: for My name shall be great among the heathen, says the Lord of Hosts.” Are you not charmed by the divine prophecy? Will you not, yourselves, help to fulfill it?

We know that this altar of incense meant prayer, because the Jews themselves so interpreted it. In the first chapter of Luke we read of Zacharias, that it was his turn in the order of his course to go into the Holy Place to offer incense, and it says, “And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the time of incense.” Just so, the offering of incense clearly means prayer, and therefore I plead, that while we are lighting the lamps by preaching the gospel, you will burn the incense by being constantly in prayer. Brethren, pray for us. Paul spoke thus; how much more may I? Dismiss me or intercede for me. Joshua could not prevail except as Moses held up his hands. Our lamp-lighting will not succeed unless you burn the incense. Peter’s sermon at Pentecost did not derive its force from Peter’s zeal, or from its own eloquence, but from another source. Of course, all the power came from the Spirit of God, but why did the Spirit of God work so mightily on that day? Surely it was because the entire church was earnestly praying while Peter was preaching. “They were all with one accord in one place,” nobody was away, they were all there, and when the one man stood up to preach, he might well light 3,000 lamps, for all the fervent company of the faithful were causing the incense of prayer to ascend to heaven. I need your prayers for tonight’s sermon. You will not be here, for strangers are invited to occupy your seats, and therefore I beg you in your houses to cry unto the Lord for me that the word may have free course, and that my hearers may feel its power. It might be the most profitable expenditure of time that ever happened to you if you would spend the whole evening in prayer. Beseech the Lord to bring the people to this house, and to bring the right sort of people, rich and poor, believers and infidels, moral people and the depraved. We do not know who will come. Some of them do not know whether they will come themselves or not. But the Lord may influence, in various ways those individuals to come whom He designs to bless. Pray that the fish may come in shoals round the boat. When the congregation is gathered, pray that the speaker may be guided of the Holy Spirit to a right theme. The preacher has no manuscript, so that there is room for the Spirit’s guidance, and he may be led to say what he never thought of saying. The right word may thus be spoken in the right way, so as to reach the heart. Then pray that there may be given the willing ear, the receptive mind, the retentive memory, that impressions may be made to-night, and at all other times, such as even Satan cannot remove. And oh, pray that many may decide for God tonight who have been halting between two opinions, many converted who have not before found the Savior’s face, many led into the joy of the Lord who have been hitherto of a sorrowful spirit. I shall feel it a joyous work to be the lamplighter tonight for my Master, if I know that I have you at home pleading earnestly on my behalf. Give me this aid this morning. Pray God to bless each word that has been spoken. Pray that some poor sinner’s soul may be perfumed by the merits of Jesus and illuminated with the light divine, and it shall be done, for the Lord hears His people. We need more and more to be a praying church, and then we shall be a growing church. Up to now we have had a great blessing, but the windows of heaven are wide enough for a greater one to come down through them. The more we plead with God, and the more we set forth the light of the gospel, the more will God be with us, and build up in this place a temple for His praise. May His love be with you. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—EXODUS 29:38-46, 30:1-10, 34-38, HEBREWS 10:11-22.

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